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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: NINEWA: YEZIDI SEEK CONTROL OF SHAIKHAN DISTRICT
AND RECOGNITION AS RELIGIOUS MINORITY UNDER KRG CONSTITUTION

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Alex Laskaris for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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Subject: Ninewa: Yezidi seek control of Shaikhan and recognition as religious minority under KRG constitution

11. (C) The Yezidi Prince Tahseen Beg told us that his community seeks political control of Shaikhan district plus guaranteed rights as a religious minority under the KRG constitution. He believes that the KRG seeks to engineer demographic changes that will make Sunni Kurds the majority in Shaikhan. He does not expect elections until that change is complete. The Prince confirmed that the Yezidi throughout Ninewa prefer to remain under the KRG, but alleged that behind a secular faade, there is a strong Islamist tendency in all Kurdish politics. To counter the alleged threat of Kurdish Islamism, he seeks USG intervention on the KRG constitution as well as assistance in gaining Yezidi representation in the Shaikhan district government. He would like Yezidi participation in UN-sponsored inter-faith meetings and a multiple-entry NIV to allow him to visit his brethren in Canada next time he is in the US. End summary.

12. (C) PRT leader met twice in the last week with Prince Tahseen Beg, the hereditary civil leader of the Yezidi people. The first meeting took place under a continuous KRG secret police presence in Shaikhan and Lalesh on September 16; the second at a private meeting in the Prince,s Dahuk residence on September 21.

13. (S/NF) In Dahuk, the Prince told us that one of the 19 members of the KRG constitutional committee is a Yezidi who shares working drafts of the constitution with him. The Prince is lobbying to have the Yezidi recognized as a religious minority in a document that thus far only recognizes ethnic minorities. He complained that the KRG welcomed Yezidi support in 2003 but later came to view the Yezidi as Kurds with rights guaranteed solely on that basis. The Prince said that this would be adequate if the KRG were a secular government, but that it opens the door for continued oppression of the Yezidi since in his view &seventy-five percent of KRG officials are Islamists.8 (Comment: Whatever the Prince's experience with lower level officials, most Kurds (and most senior KRG officials) are relatively secular and reject &political Islam.8 End comment.)

14. (S) The Prince,s key demand from the KRG is political control of Shaikhan district since it was historically a Yezidi district until his father, in the late 1920s, allowed Arabs and Sunni Kurds to move in to the area. He said that up until the 1950s, Shaikhan was 90-95 percent Yezidi, now it is 80 percent and dropping due to KRG-supported Sunni Kurd encroachment. The Prince wants a freeze on non-Yezidi settlement in the district as well as economic development to stem the migration of Yezidi to Europe which he indicated was happening at a pace of 20-25 per month.

15. (S) The Prince complained that none of the important Shaikhan district officials are Yezidi. He said that the mayor of Shaikhan is a non-observant Sunni Kurd and the head of the secret police (the Assa,ash) is devout Sunni Kurd. In his view, both posts should be Yezidi-occupied, the first via elections, and the second via a political agreement. In

addition, the head of the Assa,ash, he noted, is the true power in the district and he dislikes the Yezidi. The Prince noted that the chief of police, the KDP boss, key directors general, and the local Peshmerga leadership are all Sunni Kurds, with only one insignificant DG position held by a Yezidi. The Prince said that the Mayor is the face of the KRG to the international community, but he views the Assa,ash head as a more accurate reflection of KRG sentiment.

¶6. (S) Note: We met Shaikhan Mayor Butan Muhsan on September 16. In private, he mocked Yezidi and Sunni believers equally. He said he was sent by the KRG to Shaikhan following rioting 18 months ago between Muslim and Yezidi communities who were equally incensed about a mixed marriage that had taken place. Asked why there was no district council in Shaikhan, the mayor replied, &I have to keep all the fanatics out of politics.8 Assa,ash head Khairi (FNU), who hovered throughout the day in Shaikhan was openly devout and reacted badly when asked if he was a Yezidi. That question launched him on the Islamic history of the region and he was visibly upset when the mayor served tea in his office and joined in the subsequent feast at the Yezidi temple during Ramadan. End note.

¶7. (S) The Prince was also focused on Section 5, Article 105 of the draft, which provides for guaranteed local representation of any recognized minority group with over 3,000 members in governing structures. He asked for USG support to extend that right to the Yezidi, with the aim of protecting Yezidis in districts where they were a minority: especially Sinjar, Tal Afar, Tel Kaif and Hamdaniya.

¶8. (S) The Prince told us that he had a brief Papal audience in Rome on his most recent trip abroad. He said that the Pope clearly did not know about the Yezidi, but he was

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reassured nonetheless that the issue of religious freedom and tolerance in Iraq commanded Papal attention. The Prince had two complaints about his time in the United States: his three-month single entry visa made it impossible for him to visit the community in Canada and the Yezidi have not been invited to UN-sponsored inter-faith gatherings.

¶9. (C) Bio note: The Prince was born Tahseen Sayeed Ali in 1933 in Badra, Shaikhan district. He assumed the hereditary post at the age of 11, but with his grandmother as regent until his 18th birthday. He has three wives, one each in Badra, Shaikhan and Dahuk. He has 10 children, and had two more that passed away (NFI). His native language is Kurdish, and he speaks fluent Arabic and passable English. He told us that he intends to abolish the hereditary position of Prince by giving the Yezidi the right to choose their leader even if the title passes from his family. This proto-democratic impulse notwithstanding, the Prince adheres strictly to the Yezidi's four-caste system: royal family, sheikhs, clerics and everyone else. He insists that Yezidi marry exclusively within the faith and within their caste and opposes conversion to and from the Yezidi faith.

¶10. (C) Comment: These meetings clarified the Prince's political vision, which we believe is broadly shared within the Yezidi community. He wants his community to remain under the KRG, but with Yezidi local political control of Shaikhan district based on majority rule, and special status for the Yezidi as a religious minority in Sinjar, Tel Kaif and Hamdaniya districts. Our view is that the Yezidi constitute a discrete identity within Iraq, one that has faced broad discrimination on religious grounds in the past and that would benefit from legal recognition (as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians are recognized explicitly in the Iraqi constitution's Article 125). Yezidi participation in UN-sponsored inter-faith meetings would be important. UNAMI officials should press for their routine inclusion. It also would be helpful if we could extend a multiple entry visa to the Prince the next time he travels to the U.S., to facilitate his travel to Canada and back to the U.S.

¶11. (C) Comment continued: The Yezidi community in the Kurdistan Region has two Ministers for Yezidi Affairs (one each from KDP and PUK) and three members in the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA). Yezidi parliamentarians have run

for election as KDP or PUK members in the KNA and in the Baghdad Council of Representatives. There will be limits on Yezidi political power, however, given their minority status and KDP/PUK control over local governance (with little if any bottom-up political representation) and especially in the absence of a provincial powers law in the Kurdistan Region that could devolve power downward. Nevertheless, there may be some communitarian rights mechanisms (e.g., quotas for ministerial or legislative representation or participation in local security forces, ethnic vetoes, village autonomy, decision power on local issues like schooling or language, etc.) that would be useful and acceptable. Instituting community protections for minority groups in the KRG could help reassure Yezidis, Christians, Shebaks and Arabs that they will not be steamrolled by the Kurdish majority, especially in disputed areas that the UN recommends be allowed to join the KRG. If well done, they could also serve as a useful template for establishing stronger minority protections in other ethnically heterogeneous parts of Iraq like Kirkuk, helping to decrease political tensions. Embassy and RRT Erbil will discuss this matter with KRG officials further as they work to draft the KRG constitution. End comment.

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